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ABSTRACT

When curriculum developers and project directors plan in-service training courses for the purpose of improvement of instruction in special programs, they often fail to include support staff members such as learning disability teacher consultants, guidance counselors, social workers, school librarians, and other support personnel in the target group to be reached by the training. These staff members should be recognized as potential sources of help for ESL (English as a second language) learners. An ESL in-service course designed to supplement the skills of a wide variety of support personnel is described. The major aspects of ESL education and the special needs of ESL pupils in Grades K-12 are treated in the course. In addition, the staff members enrolled in this in-service training course are involved in several participant-oriented activities, including a cross-cultural communications training simulation experience. (Author/CFM)

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Title: Help for ESL Learners - a paper presented at the Tenth Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), November 25-28, 1976, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

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Help for ESL Learners

Background

In Woodbridge Township, New Jersey, as in many school districts in the United States, ESL learners represent a very small percentage of the pupil population. For example, in Woodbridge Township, the 75 pupils studying English as a Second Language make up less than one-half of one percent of the total enrollment of 17,228 students. Furthermore, they are found in grades K-12 throughout the district's 28 schools.

Nevertheless, in recognition of these pupils' special needs, the school district provides an ESL program for them. One of the unique features of this program is an ESL in-service course designed to acquaint professional staff members other than classroom teachers and ESL teachers with the major aspects of teaching English as a Second Language.

Although it may at first seem surprising that such a course should be implemented for this target group, the decision to do so was based on Woodbridge Township School District's awareness of the fact that one of the most neglected areas of teacher training is in-service education, especially in-service training for support personnel concerning special programs and the special needs of the pupils enrolled in these programs. For this reason, we developed the ESL in-service course to supplement the skills of a wide variety of support personnel.

This paper will describe the in-service program in detail and will explain why school district personnel such as learning consultants, social workers, special education teachers, and school librarians should

be recognized as potential sources of help for ESL learners. In addition, it will indicate how an in-service program of this type can help improve the quality of the services that such staff members provide.

Organization of the Course

The Woodbridge Township English as a Second Language In-Service Program is offered to professional staff members on a voluntary basis. The ten hour course consists of one 2-hour session after school weekly for five weeks. The school district offers one point of credit toward a salary increment for successful completion of the course.

Of course, this is only one of many models to select from in organizing an in-service program. One alternative form might be one 2-hour session monthly in place of a regularly scheduled staff meeting. In this case, the district may not wish to offer salary credit for attendance.

Coordination and Instruction for the Course

A member of the supervisory staff usually coordinates a course taught as part of the Woodbridge Township In-Service Program. However, since we develop each semester's program from suggestions for courses and instructors submitted by a wide variety of staff members ranging from classroom teachers to assistant superintendents, instructors for whole courses or for individual sessions may include supervisors, elementary coordinators, classroom teachers, school administrators, consultants or a combination of these.

For the ESL In-Service course, the following combination of instructors is used: the Supervisor of Foreign Language/ESL coordinates the course and teaches three sessions. An outside consultant teaches one session, and a local department head teaches one session.

Course Content

The course aims at giving an overview of the major areas of ESL education affecting the pupils in our district.

Session One, the introductory session, includes a description, including a slide show, of the ESL learners in our district--their ages, the languages they speak, their literacy levels in both English and their mother tongue, and their socio-economic backgrounds; a discussion of the current status of ESL instruction in our district with regard to in-classroom ESL lessons, supplementary instruction, and other resources; and a survey, by means of an informal opinionnaire, of the participants' awareness of the nature and purposes of ESL instruction. This opinionnaire, which appears in the Appendix, contains many provocative statements designed to elicit strong reactions from participants who hasten to verbalize their feelings. This activity proves an excellent technique for "breaking the ice" and getting participants involved in a lively discussion. In addition, the items on the opinionnaire are related to the major topics of the five in-service sessions; namely, the nature of the ESL learner; ESL teaching-learning theories and methods; testing and ESL; and cultural differences and the ESL learner. In this manner, the opinionnaire sparks the participants' interest and offers them a preview of the remaining sessions.

Session One also includes a presentation made by the instructor for the purpose of clarifying the implications of the New Jersey Bilingual Education Act in terms of its requirements concerning both teacher certification and the development of local programs to meet the English language needs of limited English speaking children.

Session Two involves both an explanation and demonstration of several major language teaching methodologies, including the audio-lingual method, the cognitive code method, and the Silent Way. The participants examine the advantages and disadvantages of each of these methods as they relate to local conditions.

Practical application of theory is also included in this session. Since many of the participants are not familiar with oral pattern practice activities, the instructor distributes a handout explaining ten different types of pattern drills. Next, she describes each type of drill and illustrates it by means of examples. Finally, she asks the participants to divide into pairs to practice drills as teacher and student, giving each pair an index card naming a specific type of pattern drill, providing a model sentence, and indicating precisely the type and number of practice items to be drilled. Although it would be much more beneficial to have "real" ESL students with whom to practice drilling, the participants role-play their teacher-student parts with success. Furthermore, they comment favorably about participating actively in the session rather than listening passively to a lecture. The second session concludes with a display and a description of selected teacher-made and professionally prepared ESL materials for elementary school pupils.

Session Three focuses on the secondary school ESL pupil. It draws on the expertise and experience of one of Woodbridge Township's senior high school foreign language department heads. This member of our teaching staff has herself been a second language learner overseas, and has also served as instructor of both ESL and foreign language in the United States. In our township she has worked with both exchange students and new residents.

Her presentation addresses itself to specific aspects of American secondary schooling that present severe adjustment problems to culturally different limited English speakers. She identifies the major problem areas that the ESL pupils are faced with as learning English, achieving in subject matter classes, and fitting in socially with teenage peers. She offers several recommendations for helping the students cope with and overcome these obstacles.

The third session ends with a display of commercially prepared ESL materials and textbooks, and includes a discussion of ways in which the use of specific materials prove beneficial to our students.

Session Four centers on several problems encountered in testing the English language proficiency of the limited English speaking. At the time of our first ESL In-Service Course, the New Jersey Bureau of Bilingual Education had just mandated that an English Language Proficiency Test be used as a screening device each year to determine which children enrolled in New Jersey schools were limited English speakers. Each district is free to develop its own test if it so desires, but all tests of English language proficiency used for the screening must have the prior approval of the New Jersey Bureau of Bilingual Education.

Accordingly, the major topic of the fourth session is the locally developed English language proficiency test. This test, which has received the necessary approval from the New Jersey Bureau of Bilingual Education, consists of a series of sub-tests of listening, comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. There is a separate series of tests for each grade level, K-12.

After the purpose of the test and its contents are described to them, the participants are asked to divide into groups of two. Each pair is given testing materials, and with one member acting as tester and the other as testee, they are led step by step through the testing process.

Although this exercise takes quite a large portion of the session, enough time remains to examine and discuss several other tests for limited English speakers; specifically, the Bilingual Syntax Measure, the "John" Test and the CELT. Each participant is also given a copy of the annotated bibliography of tests prepared by the research staff of Project BEST in New York City. Copies of Oral Language Tests for Bilingual Students (Silverman, et al, 1976) and Testing English as a Second Language (Harris, 1969) are also provided as resource materials.

Session Five, the final session, is devoted to problems of cross-cultural communication. Because the participants have had very little experience with limited English speakers up to this point, it is first necessary to introduce certain theories relating to communications across cultures to them. Given the time limitations of the session and the need to pass from theory to application as quickly as possible, it is only possible to present these ideas in rather simplified form. The major concepts presented are:

1. one's culture instills group goals, mores, taboos, values, and levels of aspiration upon its members (Zintz, 1969).
2. one internalizes much of one's way of behaving as a result of conforming to the demands of one's culture, and
3. communication between members of different cultures may be prevented or impaired because of culture-related differences in their verbal or non-verbal behavior.

Next, the need to apply these principles to the education of the limited English speaking child is illustrated by examples contrasting the values of the dominant American culture with those of the Zuni Indians detailed by Zintz in Education Across Cultures in the Southwest (1969).

Finally, in order to "bring home" to them the frustration that can be experienced as the result of an attempt to communicate when the communicators are on different cultural "wave lengths", the participants are asked to engage in a simulation exercise inspired by "Heelotia".

"Heelotia", developed by Wider Horizons, is a cross-cultural communication training activity designed to promote awareness of culturally determined barriers to effective communication across cultures. "Heelotia" consists of a period of simulated interaction between two imaginary, culturally different groups followed by a debriefing session in which participants analyze the often ethnocentric feelings and attitudes that emerge during the interaction period.

Our role-playing exercise differs from "Heelotia" in several ways, most notably in that participants are divided into groups of three persons whose roles are structured for interaction on an individual rather than on a group basis, and in that the situation to be simulated is a familiar one--a parent-teacher conference.

We selected this format for the simulation for the following reasons: the number of staff members enrolled in one of our ten hour courses rarely exceeds twenty persons - thus it is impractical for us to plan a large group interaction simulation; the very small group size assures full participation of each individual in the role-playing activity; and the shifting of the focus of the simulation to a familiar activity increases

the likelihood of the participants' relating the cross-cultural communication exercise to a potential situation to be encountered on-the-job.

Once the participants have divided themselves into groups of three, they are asked to designate themselves as Person #1, Person #2, and Person #3. At this point, they receive the role title and the role description on Role Sheets corresponding to each Person and are asked to read this information carefully (the Appendix contains examples of the Role Sheets). Next, the participant groups are told that each group will separately and simultaneously role play a parent-teacher conference requested by Person #1, Mr./Ms. Smith, the mathematics teacher. Person #3, Mr./Mrs. Heems is the name of the parent involved, and Person #2, Mr./Ms. Jones, the guidance counselor who will be present at Mr./Ms. Jones' request. The instructor gives no further details about the conference to be role-played, nor about Mr./Ms. Jones, Mr./Ms. Smith, and Mr./Mrs. Heems. The instructor further indicates that the participants are not to show or read their "ROLE SHEETS" to each other, but are to draw upon the information given to them on the sheets in order to play their parts.

In the debriefing session which follows the mock conference, the participants bring to light their perceptions of the barriers to communication encountered as they attempted to play their roles. They point out that during the conference they tended to feel that Mr./Mrs. Heems was behaving as he/she did because of her individual personality traits, not because of her different cultural background. Later, as the debriefing proceeds and they are made aware of the information on all three ROLE SHEETS, they begin to realize that Mr./Mrs. Heems' behavior was to a great extent determined by the cultural attributes of the imaginary Heelotian way of life. They also conclude that other

Heelots would be very likely to act in much the same manner as Mr./Mrs. Heems - in fact the Mr./Mrs. Heems in each "conference" group did that very thing during the simulation!

This role-playing activity concludes the final session, as well as the course itself, on a positive note. Before leaving, participants usually comment to the instructor that they have gained new insight into the way cultural attributes can inhibit effective cross-cultural communication.

Reasons for Selecting Support Personnel as the Target Group

Although we regularly offer approximately 15 after school in-service courses per semester to all our staff members and plan both group and individual in-service programs for teachers of pupils learning English as a Second Language, we selected our support personnel as the target group for this ESL in-service series for several reasons.

First, since support personnel such as elementary coordinators, guidance counselors, learning disability teacher consultants, school psychologists, remedial reading instructors, school librarians, special education teachers, subject supervisors, and supplementary instructors work cooperatively with classroom teachers and administrators for the solution of educational problems, we believed that they would transmit to other staff members the new insights developed as a result of participation in the course. This would create a "ripple effect" and would thus extend the range of the ESL program's impact throughout the school district. Other reasons for selecting this target group were: these staff members meet pupils in an individual basis and deal with many facets of the pupil's personality and background, and have proved receptive to the idea that many social, cultural, intellectual, psychological, and economic factors that must be considered when working with an ESL learner; they often deal with

the atypical pupil and need the insights required to differentiate between problems associated with ESL learning (whether social or intellectual) and learning difficulties exhibited by pupils of English language background. Finally, members of our support personnel staff had sought the help of our ESL consultant in working with ESL learners, indicating that they had had little contact up to now with English as a Second Language Education through regular teacher training channels such as graduate study, educational journals, conference and workshop attendance.

Improved Services for ESL Pupils

Feedback from course participants indicate that they have experienced attitude and behavioral changes which, in turn, have resulted in improvement in the quality of the services provided to the English as a Second Language learners in our district.

Some examples of noted attitude changes are as follows: 1) a shift from viewing the ESL pupil as a problem for which there seems to be no solution to a pupil in need of individualized instruction (since there are so few ESL learners at each grade level, individual pupils receive thirty minutes of pull-out ESL instruction daily and spend the remainder of their time in the "regular" classroom); 2) an awareness that the ESL pupil's problems may not necessarily stem from a learning disability but from the difficulty that pupils often encounter when learning the medium of instruction, English, at the same time as the content of instruction; 3) the realization that ESL pupils need time and instruction to learn English, and that they cannot just "pick it up" in a year or less and achieve in their subjects at the same grade level proficiency as their age peers, and 4) the understanding that it is usually necessary to comprehend the ESL

pupil's different cultural background in order to interpret behavior and attitudes which appear to conflict with the school's accepted norms for students.

Since the ESL In-Service Course was initiated, several changes have also taken place in the behavior of support personnel as they provide services to ESL pupils.

There has been a 90% increase in communication with the ESL consultant initiated by support personnel concerning the educational program of individual ESL pupils and a 95% increase in requests for specific ESL instructional materials by title and publisher.

In addition, individual members of the support personnel staff report engaging in new activities designed to assist ESL learners. For example, three guidance counselors are seeking to place students in summer ESL programs to sharpen their English language skills. These counselors are also seeking special college scholarship aid for their students based on their ESL and minority group status.

Another instance of support staff behavior benefiting ESL pupils is one school librarian's purchasing ten books of stories centered on the experiences of Latino children. She believes that reading these books will help boost the self-image of the children of Hispanic background in her school.

Finally, it seems logical to conclude that the increase in enrollment from twelve participants for the fall semester to twenty-one participants for the spring indicates that support staff members view this in-service course as a source of help in improving the quality of the educational services that they provide to ESL learners.

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APPENDIX

WOODBRIDGE TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Foreign Language Department

English as a Second Language Opinionnaire

Using the following scale, react to the statements below by placing the number which best fits your opinion in the space to the right of the statement.

1 strongly agree 2 agree 3 no opinion 4 disagree
5 strongly disagree

1. ESL learner is a limited English speaker according to N. J. Bureau of Bilingual Education. 1._____
2. An ESL learner born in the U. S. may have as much or more difficulty as one born abroad. 2._____
3. ESL is mainly for Spanish speakers. 3._____
4. A limited English speaker is not the same as a bilingual. 4._____
5. Most ESL learners are quite bright and can "pick up" English quickly without much extra help. 5._____
6. It is very important to see to it that ESL students become Americanized very quickly. 6._____
7. A person who knows a second language well may not necessarily function well in the culture. 7._____
8. The ESL student's cultural background will not affect his ability to learn English in American schools. 8._____
9. English as a Second Language instruction is limited to teaching the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. 9._____
10. Bilingual and Bicultural are not synonyms. 10._____
11. Acculturation means to take on the characteristics of the host culture. 11._____
12. ESL is a form of remedial English instruction. 12._____
13. To be an effective ESL teacher one must speak the ESL student's native language. 13._____
14. When we teach English as a Second Language we are not teaching a foreign language to the learner. 14._____
15. English as a Second Language and Bilingual Education are virtually the same thing. 15._____
16. To teach ESL we use the same materials and methods as we use to teach native speakers of English except that the ESL learners need more instruction. 16._____
17. It is easy to determine whether or not a student needs ESL instruction. 17._____
18. There are many fine tests available on the market for the purpose of determining who needs ESL. 18._____
19. English is not a very easy language for speakers of other languages to learn. 19._____
20. It takes about 600 hours of instruction and hard practice to function on an everyday basis in a foreign language. 20._____

9/28/76 B. Petrello

WOODBRIDGE TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Foreign Language Department

E.S.L. In-Service Course ROLE SHEET

#1 Teacher: Mr./Ms. Smith

Role Description You are an excellent, experienced, successful math teacher.

Issue A foreign student in your Algebra I class, How Heems, a Heelot who speaks English fluently and is very intelligent, is doing very poorly in math. Furthermore, he seems "hard to reach" and even shrinks from you when you draw near to help him in class.

Information You've requested a parental conference, with a guidance counselor present to help clear up the problem.

Adapted from Heelotia
by B. Petrello
10/14/76

WOODBRIDGE TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Foreign Language Department

E.S.L. In-Service Course ROLE SHEET

#2 Guidance Counselor: Mr./Ms. Jones

Role Description You are an experienced counselor. However, your only experience with foreign students were two Brazilian exchange students who knew practically no English.

Issue The teacher has asked you to observe at the conference and to assist if needed.

Information You're not quite sure why the teacher is having problems, especially since the student speaks English so well.

Adapted from Heelotia
by B. Petrello
10/14/76

WOODBRIDGE TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

Foreign Language Department

E.S.L. In-Service Course ROLE SHEET

#3 Parent: Mr./Mrs. Heems

Role Description You are a Heelot who speaks fluent English. You have just moved to the U.S. You are unfamiliar with the American educational system, so you do not understand exactly why you have been called in for a conference.

Information As a Heelot you have certain major values and you adhere to these without question. They color all your interpersonal relationships and social processes.

1. Information about vital statistics is important to you. It is the major topic of conversation in your society, and you constantly refer to vital statistics in all conversations.
2. You have a peculiar sense of privacy. Certain matters are extremely private and are never discussed with more than one person.
   - A. Numbers are a very private matter. Never discuss numbers with more than one person at a time.
   - B. In your culture bodies are also a very private matter. Never touch another person or allow yourself to be touched.
   - C. Through the years Heelotia, your country, has developed a strong taboo against eye-contact. Consequently, you never look another person in the eye, but approach him and converse with him right side of face to right side of face.

Adapted from Heelotia
by B. Petrello
10/14/76